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He was sick to death of her nagging.

Bitch and complain, bitch and complain, and nag, nag, nag every time she opened her damn mouth.

He'd like to shut it for her.

Jerald Reinhold sat at the kitchen table, while his mother's never-ending list of criticisms and demands rolled over him in dark, swollen clouds.

Every fucking day, he thought, the same thing. Like it was his fault he'd lost his stupid, dead-end job. His fault his girlfriend – another bitch who never shut up – kicked him out so he had to move back in with his whining, mouthy parents. His fault he'd dropped a few thousand in Vegas and had some credit card debt.

Jesus! His fault, his fault, his fault. The old bitch never cut him the smallest break.

Hadn't he told her that he wouldn't have lost his job if his prick of a supervisor hadn't fired him? So he'd taken a few days off, who didn't? So he'd been late a few times, who wasn't?

Unless you were a work-droid like his idiot father.

But God, she made it such a big fucking deal. He'd hated

the job anyway, and only took it because Lori badgered him into it, but he got all the blame.

He was twenty-six, for Christ's sake, and deserved a hell of a lot better than working for chump change as a take-out delivery boy.

And Lori gives him the boot just because he's out of work – temporarily – and goes batshit on him because he lost a few bucks on a trip with some friends?

He could, and would, do a lot better than Lori wide-ass Nuccio. Bitch threatened to call the cops just because he gave her a few smacks. She deserved a lot more than a couple love taps, and he wished like hell he'd given her just what she deserved.

He deserved more than a room in his parents' apartment and his mother's incessant hammering.

'Jerry, are you listening to me?' Barbara Reinhold fisted her hands on her hips.

Jerry lifted his gaze from the screen of his PPC where he was *trying* to relax with a game. He spared his skinny, flat-chested, know-it-all mother one smoldering glance.

'How can I help it when you never shut up?'

'That's how you talk to me? That's how you show your gratitude for the roof over your head, the food we put in your belly?' She lifted a plate that held a slice of bread, a thin slice of fake turkey. 'I'm standing here making you a sandwich since you finally dragged yourself out of bed at noon, and you sass me? It's no wonder Lori kicked you out. I'm telling you one thing, mister, you're not getting a free ride here

much longer. It's been almost a month now, and you haven't done diddly about finding a job.'

He thought: *Shut the fuck up or I'll shut you up.* But he didn't say it. He wanted the sandwich.

'You're irresponsible, just like your father said, but I said, he's our son, Carl, and we have to help him out. When are you going to help yourself, that's what I want to know.'

'I told you I'd get a job. I've got options. I'm considering my options.'

'Your options.' She snorted, went back to building the sandwich. 'You've gone through four jobs this year. What options are you considering while you're sitting here in the middle of the day in the ratty sweats you slept in? I told you they're looking for a stock boy down at the market, but do you go and see about it?'

'I'm not a freaking stock boy.' He was *better* than that. He was somebody. He'd *be* somebody if people gave him half a break. 'Get off my back.'

'Maybe we haven't been on your back enough.' She layered a slice of bright orange cheese on top of the turkey, and her voice took on the soft, reasonable tone he hated.

'Your father and I scrimped and saved so you could go to college, and you flunked out. You said how you wanted to train so you could learn how to develop those computer games you like so much, and we backed you on that, put the money to that. When that didn't work, your dad got you a job at his office. He went to bat for you, Jerry, and you screwed around and mouthed off, and got fired.'

She picked a knife from the block to cut the sandwich. ‘Then you met Lori, and she was the sweetest thing. A smart girl, a hardworking girl from a real nice family. We had such high hopes there. She got you working as a busboy in the restaurant where she works, and she stuck with you when you lost that job. When you said how you could get a messenger job if you had a good bike, we made you a loan, but that didn’t last two months. And you never paid us back, Jerry. Now this last job’s gone, too.’

‘I’m tired of you throwing the past in my face, and acting like it was all my fault.’

‘The past keeps repeating, Jerry, and seems to be getting worse.’

Her lips pressed together as she added a handful of the Onion Doodles he liked to the plate. ‘You’re out of work again, and you can’t afford a place of your own. You took the rent money and the tip money Lori had saved up and went off to Las Vegas with Dave and that no-account Joe. And you came back broke.’

‘That’s a damn lie.’ He shoved to his feet. ‘It was my money, and I’ve got a right to take a break with my friends, to have some goddamn fun.’

There was a sheen in her eyes – not of tears, not of anger, but of disappointment. It made him want to punch, punch, punch that sheen away.

‘It was the rent money, Jerry, and the money Lori saved up from her tips. She told me.’

‘You’re going to take her word over mine?’

On a sigh, she folded a napkin into a triangle as she had for him when he was a boy. Her dented heart came clearly through the sound, but all he heard was accusation.

‘You lie, Jerry, and you use people, and I’m worried we let you get away with it for too long. We keep giving you chances, and you keep throwing them away. Maybe some of that’s our fault, and maybe that’s part of the reason you think you can talk to me the way you are.’

She set the plate on the table, poured a glass of the coffee-flavored drink he liked. ‘Your father and I were hoping you’d find a job today, or at least go out and look, make a real effort. We talked about it after you went out with your friends again last night. After you took fifty dollars out of my emergency cash without asking.’

‘What are you talking about?’ He gave her his best shocked and insulted look. ‘I didn’t take anything from you. You’re saying I’m stealing now? Ma!’

‘It wouldn’t be the first time.’ Her lips compressed when her voice wavered some, and she came back with the no-more-bullshit tone he knew drew a deep, hard line.

‘We talked it over, decided we had to take a stand, Jerry. We were going to tell you together when your father gets home, but I’ll tell you now so you’ll have that much more time. We’re giving you until the first of the month – that’s the first of December, Jerry – to find work. If you don’t get a job, you can’t stay here.’

‘I need some time.’

‘We’ve given you a month, Jerry, and you haven’t done

anything except go out at night and sleep half the day. You haven't tried to get work. You're a grown man, but you act like a kid, and a spoiled, ungrateful one. If you want more time, if you want us behind you, you eat your lunch, then you go out and look for a job. You go down to the market and get that stock boy job, and as long as you're working and show us you're trying, you can stay.'

'You don't understand.' He forced tears into his eyes, a usual no-fail. 'Lori dumped me. She was *everything* to me and she threw me over for some other guy.'

'What other guy?'

'I don't know who the hell he is. She broke my heart, Ma. I need some time to get through it.'

'You said she kicked you out because you lost your job.'

'That was part of it, sure. That asshole at Americana had it in for me, from day one. But instead of taking my side, she flips me over because I can't buy her stuff. Then she tells you all these lies about me, trying to turn my own mother against me.'

'Eat your lunch,' Barbara said, wearily. 'Then get cleaned up, get dressed, and go down to the market. If you do that, Jerry, we'll give you more time.'

'And if I don't, you'll kick me out? You'll just boot me to the street like I'm nobody? My own parents.'

'It hurts us to do it, but it's for your own good, Jerry. It's time you learned to do what's right.'

He stared at her, imagined her and his father plotting and planning against him. 'Maybe you're right.'

‘We want you to find your place, Jerry. We want you to be a man.’

He nodded as he crossed to her. ‘To find my place. To be a man. Okay.’ He picked up the knife she’d used to cut his sandwich, shoved it into her belly.

Her eyes popped wide; her mouth fell open.

He hadn’t planned to do it, hadn’t given it more than an instant’s conscious thought. But God! It felt amazing. Better than sex. Better than a good, solid hit of Race. Better than anything he’d ever felt in his life.

He yanked the knife free. She stumbled back, throwing up her hands. She said, ‘Jerry,’ on a kind of gurgle.

And he jammed the blade into her again. He *loved* the sound it made. Going in, coming out. He loved the look of absolute shock on her face, and the way her hands slapped weakly at him as if something tickled.

So he did it again, then again, into her back when she tried to run. And again when she fell to the kitchen floor and flopped like a landed fish.

He did it long after she stopped moving at all.

‘Now that was for my own good.’

He looked at his hands, covered with her blood, at the spreading pool of red on the floor, the wild spatters of it on the walls, the counter that reminded him of some of the crazy paintings at MOMA.

An artist, he mused. Maybe he should be an artist.

He set the knife on the table, then washed his hands, his arms, in the kitchen sink. Watched the red circle and drain.

She'd been right, he thought, about finding his place, about being a man. He'd found his place now, and knew exactly how to claim his manhood.

He'd take what he wanted, and anyone who screwed with him? They had to pay. He had to *make* them pay, because nothing else in his life had ever made him feel so good, so real, so *happy*.

He sat down, glanced at where his mother's body lay sprawled, and thought he couldn't wait until his father got home.

Then he ate his sandwich.

Lieutenant Eve Dallas strapped on her weapon harness. She'd had a short stack of waffles for breakfast – something that tended to put a smile on her face. Her husband, unquestionably the most gorgeous man ever created, enjoyed another cup of superior coffee in the sitting area of their bedroom. Their cat, who'd just been warned off the attempt to sneak onto the table, sat on the floor washing his fat flank.

It made a nice picture, she thought: Roarke, his mane of black hair loose around his wonderfully carved face, that beautiful mouth in a half smile, and his wild blue eyes on her. The dishes from their meal together on the table, and Galahad pretending he didn't want his nose in the syrup added to the 'at-home and liking it' ambience.

'You look pleased with yourself, Lieutenant.'

'I'm pleased,' she said, and added that musical murmur of Ireland in Roarke's voice to her list of morning enjoyments.

‘I’ve had a couple of days without a hot one so I’m nearly caught up on paperwork. The quick scan of the weather for today told me I won’t be freezing my ass off, and I’m heading out with a belly-load of waffles. It’s a good day, so far.’

She hooked a brown vest over her shirt – both Roarke approved – then sat to pull on her boots.

‘Generally you’d prefer several hot ones over paperwork,’ he pointed out.

‘We’re heading into the holidays, end of year 2060. You start on that season, you get the wackies. And the nearer I am to finishing my year-end report, the better. The last couple of days have been a walk, so if I get a couple more like that, I—’

‘And now you’ve done it.’ Shooting her a look of pity, he shook his head. ‘You’ve jinxed any chance you had.’

‘Irish superstition.’

‘Common sense. But speaking of Irish and holidays, the family’s coming in on Wednesday.’

‘Wednesday?’

‘That’s the Wednesday before Thanksgiving,’ he reminded her. ‘Some of the cousins are switching off so those who couldn’t come last year will. You said you were fine with it.’

‘I am. No, really, I am. I like your family.’ He’d only recently found them. He’d lived most of his life, as she had, without blood kin – and the comfort or problems family bring. ‘I’m just never sure what to do with so many people in the house who aren’t cops.’

‘They’ll be busy enough. Apparently there are many plans

in the works for shopping, sightseeing, theater, and so on. You're unlikely to have all of them at once except on Thanksgiving itself. And then there'll be all the others.'

'Yeah.' She'd agreed to that, too – and it had seemed like a fine idea at the time. All the people who'd come for dinner the previous year, in addition to her partner, Peabody, and Peabody's main man, McNab, who'd opted not to travel this year.

'It worked okay before.' Shrugging, she got to her feet. 'What is it – the more the crazier?'

'I believe it's merrier, but either way. And with that in mind, I'd like to add four more.'

'Four more what?'

'Guests. Richard DeBlass and family. Elizabeth contacted me just yesterday. He and Elizabeth are bringing the children into New York for the parade.'

'Talk about crazy. Who wants to jump into that crowd?'

'Thousands, or it wouldn't be a crowd, would it? They've booked a hotel suite along the route. I thought it would be nice to invite them to share Thanksgiving dinner. Nixie, especially, wants to see you.'

Eve thought of the girl, the lone survivor when her family had been slaughtered in a home invasion. 'Is it a good idea, bringing her back here, to where everything happened over a traditional family holiday?'

'She's adjusting well, as you know, but she needs the connection. They've made a family, the four of them, but they don't want Nixie to forget the family she lost.'

‘She’ll never forget.’

‘She’ll not, no.’ And he himself would always carry the image of the little girl in the morgue with her head resting on her father’s unbeating heart. ‘It’s not like you going back to Dallas.’ Now he rose, stepped to her. ‘Revisiting, reliving all that pain and trauma. She had a family who loved her, and was taken from her.’

‘So the connection’s important. Okay with me, but nothing’s going to induce me to go to that parade.’

‘So noted.’ He drew her in, kissed her. ‘We’ve a lot to be thankful for, you and I.’

‘And a houseful of Irish relatives, plus a ravaging horde after turkey and pie are part of that?’

‘They are indeed.’

‘I’ll let you know on Friday if I agree with that. Now I’ve gotta go.’

‘Take care of my cop.’

‘Take care of my gazillionaire.’

She left the house resigned to the coming invasion.

What was it with people? Eve wondered. Clogging up her streets, flooding her sidewalks, jamming on glides, swarming crosswalks. What made them pack into New York for holidays?

Didn’t they have homes of their own?

She fought through three nasty knots of traffic on the trip downtown to Cop Central while ad blimps blasted the news from overhead of:

BLACK FRIDAY MEGA-SALES!
GOBBLE UP BARGAINS WHILE THEY LAST!
DOOR-BUSTER HOLIDAY SALES AT THE SKY MALL

She wished to God they'd all go to the sky mall and get out of her city. Snarling with equally pissed drivers at yet another tangle, she watched a quick-fingered street thief make hay with a gaggle of oblivious tourists crowded around a smoking glide-cart.

Even if she hadn't been packed in among Rapid Cabs and a farting maxibus, the odds of catching him were slim. As fast-footed as fingered, he zipped away, richer by three wallets and two pocket 'links by her count.

The early bird catches the loot, she supposed, and a few less people would be hitting the sky mall.

She spotted a thin fracture in traffic, gunned it, and ignoring the rude blat of horns, wound her way downtown.

By the time she walked into Central, she had her plan. She'd hit the paperwork first, clear off her desk – righteously. Then she could spend some time reviewing the active cases of her detectives. Maybe she'd toss the expense reports to Peabody, let her partner handle the numbers. There might be room to pull out a cold case, give it another hard look.

Nothing much more satisfying than catching a bad guy who thought he'd gotten away with it.

She stepped off the glide – a tall, leanly built woman in a leather coat – turned toward Homicide. Her short, choppy brown hair framed an angular face accented with a shallow

dent in the chin. Her eyes scanned, as cop's eyes always did, long, golden brown and observant as she strode down the busy sector to her department.

When she turned into her bullpen she spotted Sanchez first, his feet propped on his desk as he worked his 'link. And Trueheart, spiffy and innocently handsome in his uniform, industriously at his comp. The room smelled of bad cop coffee and cheap fake sugar, so all was right with the world.

Jenkinson strolled out of the break room with a giant mug of that bad cop coffee and a lumpy-looking doughnut. He wore a gray suit the color of tarnish with a tie of nuclear blue and green curlicues on a screaming pink background.

He said, 'Yo, LT.'

'That's some tie, Jenkinson.'

After setting the mug on his desk, he flipped it. 'Just adding a little color to the world.'

'Did you steal that from one of the geeks in EDD?'

'His mama bought it for him,' Sanchez said.

'Your mama bought it for me, as a thank-you for last night.'

'It's so she can see you coming from two blocks away and get gone.'

Before Jenkinson formed a witty repartee, Baxter walked in, slick in a dark chocolate suit, expertly knotted tie that picked up the color with minute checks of brown and muted red.

He stopped as if he'd hit a force field. 'Jesus, my eyes!' He pulled out a pair of fashionable sunshades, slid them on as he

studied Jenkinson. ‘What is that around your neck? Is it alive?’

‘Your sister bought it for him.’ Still quietly working at his comp, Trueheart didn’t even look up. ‘A token of her esteem.’

The kid was coming along, Eve thought, amused, and left her men to their byplay.

In her office with its single narrow window and miserably uncomfortable visitor’s chair, she aimed straight for the AutoChef. Thanks to the Roarke connection she didn’t have to settle for bad cop coffee. She programmed a cup, hot and black, settled with it at her desk, prepared to be righteous with paperwork.

Her communicator signaled before she’d taken the first sip.

‘Dallas.’

Dispatch, Dallas, Lieutenant Eve. See the officer 735 Downing Street, Apartment 825. Two DBs, one male, one female.

‘Dallas responding. Will contact and coordinate with Detective Peabody en route.’

Acknowledged. Dispatch out.

Well, shit, she thought, gulped down coffee – burned her tongue – she *had* jinxed it. And grabbing the coat she’d just taken off, she headed out.

Others had arrived in the bullpen, and Jenkinson’s tie remained the topic of the day. Peabody, still wearing her coat, added her opinion that the tie had jazz.

But then Peabody loved the neon-sporting McNab.

‘Peabody, with me.’

‘What? Where? Already?’

Eve just kept walking so Peabody had to trot after her in her pink cowgirl boots.

What was her department coming to, Eve wondered, with pink ties, pink boots. Maybe she should ban pink from Homicide.

‘What did we catch?’

‘Looks like a double.’

‘A two-for-one start of the day.’ As she waited for the elevator, Peabody took a scarf out of her pocket, looped it around her neck.

Pink and blue checks, Eve noted. She definitely had to work on the logistics of banning pink.

‘It’s a totally gorgeous day, too,’ Peabody continued, her square face wreathed with a smile, her dark eyes shining.

‘Were you late because you grabbed morning sex?’

‘I wasn’t late. Two minutes,’ Peabody amended. ‘We got off the subway early to walk it. You won’t have many more days like this.’

They squeezed into the elevator with a boxful of cops. ‘I love fall when everything’s all crisp and breezy, and they’re roasting chestnuts on the carts.’

‘Definitely had sex.’

Peabody only smiled. ‘We had a date night last night. Just on the spur, you know. We got dressed up, went dancing, and had grown-up cocktails. We get so busy we forget to do the “just you and me” thing sometimes. It’s nice to remember.’

They corkscrewed out on the garage level.

‘Then we had sex,’ Peabody added. ‘Anyway, it’s a really nice day.’

‘Too bad the two DBs on Downing can’t enjoy it.’

‘Well . . . yeah. It just goes to show.’

‘Show what?’

‘You should get dressed up, go dancing, drink grown-up cocktails, and have sex as much as you can before you’re dead.’

‘That’s a philosophy,’ Eve said as she slid behind the wheel of her vehicle.

‘It’s almost Thanksgiving,’ Peabody pointed out.

‘I’ve heard rumors.’

‘We had this tradition, my family. We’d write down all the things we were grateful for, and put them in a bowl. And on Thanksgiving, everyone would pick out a few. The idea is, it reminds you of things you should be grateful for, or what other people appreciate. Like that. It’s nice. I know we’re not going out to be with the family this year, but I’m sending them my grateful notes.’

As she battled downtown traffic, Eve considered. ‘We’re murder cops. That must mean we have to be grateful for dead bodies or we wouldn’t have a job. But contrarily, the dead bodies aren’t likely to be grateful.’

‘No. We’re grateful we have the skill and the smarts to find and arrest the person or persons who made them dead bodies.’

‘The person or persons we catch and arrest aren’t going to be grateful. Somebody’s got to lose.’

‘That’s a philosophy,’ Peabody muttered.

‘I like to win.’ Eve pulled up behind a black-and-white on Downing. ‘I appreciate winning. Let’s go do that.’

Hefting her field kit, she started for the entrance, badged the cop on the door.

‘We’re on eight, Lieutenant.’

‘Yeah, I got that. Building security?’

‘You have to buzz in, but you know how that goes. Cams on the door, but none internal.’

‘We’ll want the door discs.’

‘Building manager’s on that.’

With a nod, she moved to the elevator. Decent building, she thought. Minimal security, but clean. The floor of the cubbyhole lobby shined, and the walls looked recently painted. And the elevator, she noted with some relief, didn’t clang or clunk when it opened.

‘Easy to gain access,’ she commented. ‘Follow somebody in, or get someone to buzz you in. No lobby security, no internal cams.’

‘Easy out, too.’

‘Exactly. The place is well maintained, so that says decent tenants and responsible management to me.’

She stepped out on eight, approached the cop standing in front of 825. ‘What have we got, Officer?’

‘Sir. The woman in 824 gained access to 825 at approximately seven-twenty this morning. She has a key and the code.’

‘Why did she go in?’

‘She and the female victim had a regular Monday trip to the local bakery, leaving sharp, according to her statement, at seven. She became concerned when no one answered the door or the ’link, and let herself in where she discovered the bodies she identified as Carl and Barbara Reinhold, listed as residents of this unit.’

‘Where’s the wit?’

‘With a female officer in her apartment. She’s pretty broken up, Lieutenant. It’s rough in there,’ he added, jerking his head toward 825.

‘Keep the wit handy.’ Eve pulled a can of Seal-It from her bag. ‘And stand by.’ She switched on her recorder.

With their hands and boots sealed, Eve and Peabody went inside.

Rough was one word for it, Eve thought. The living area remained tidy. Sofa pillows plumped, floors whistle clean, magazine discs neatly arranged on a coffee table. It made an eerie contrast to the smell of death – far from fresh.

A few steps in the room jogged slightly to the right where a table served as a demarcation between living area and kitchen.

And where the line between tidy life and ugly death dug in deep.

The man lay beside the table, his head, shoulders, and one outstretched arm under it. In death he was a bloody, broken mass in what had been a dark blue suit. Blood spatter and gray matter bloomed and smeared the walls, the kitchen cabinets – and the baseball bat that lay in the congealed river of blood beside him.

The woman lay facedown on the floor between the opposite side of the table and a refrigerator. Blood soaked through her shirt and pants so their true color had become indiscernible. Both were ripped and shredded, most probably by the kitchen knife driven through her back to the hilt.

‘They’ve been slaughtered,’ Peabody stated.

‘Yeah. A lot of rage here. Take the woman,’ Eve ordered, and crouching by the man, opened her kit.

She let the pity come, then let it go. And got to work.

2

‘Victim identified as Reinhold, Carl James. Caucasian male, age fifty-six.’ Eve scanned her Identi-pad. ‘Married to Reinhold, Barbara, nee Myers, age fifty-four.’ She glanced over at Peabody.

‘Yeah, female ID confirmed.’

‘One offspring, male, Reinhold, Jerald, age twenty-six, address listed on West Houston.’

Carl Reinhold still had both parents, she noted, who’d migrated to Florida, and a brother with a Hoboken address. The data listed the victim’s employer as Beven and Son’s Flooring, with offices and showroom just a handful of blocks away.

‘Victim was beaten severely, head, face, shoulders, chest, extremities. Injuries are consistent with the baseball bat handily left on scene, and coated with blood and gray matter. Erased his face. That’s personal.’

‘I can’t count the stab wounds on the female, Dallas. She’s been hacked to pieces.’

‘I’d say we’ve got the cause of death. Let’s get the time.’

Eve pulled out her gauge. ‘He’s been dead for about sixty-two hours. That puts it at Friday evening. Around six-thirty.’

‘She has almost six hours on him. TOD Friday, twelve-hundred-forty.’

‘Nearly six hours between kills.’ Eve sat back on her heels. ‘Kills the woman in the afternoon, then what, waits around for the man? No sign of struggle in the living area. No sign of break-in.’

She pushed up. ‘Go ahead and call for the morgue and the sweepers.’

Solid middle-class couple from the looks of it, Eve thought as she began to wander the apartment. The woman lets someone in, middle of the day? No struggle. Both killed in the kitchen.

She set that train of thought aside once she stepped into what appeared to be the main bedroom.

‘Somebody tossed the bedroom,’ she called out.

‘It’s pretty strange and vicious for a burglary,’ Peabody began, and stopped, frowning into the bedroom. ‘It looks pretty tidy.’

‘Pretty tidy, not perfectly tidy like the living area. Things are out of place here. The bedcovers aren’t smooth, the closet doors open, some clothes on the floor in there. That desk there – one of the drawers isn’t closed all the way, and where’s the comp? No comp or tablet on the desk.’

Eve pulled open a drawer on the bureau. ‘Everything’s jumbled in here. No, she kept a neat and clean house in a neat and clean building. Whoever did this was looking for something. I bet the wit’s been in here, and would know if anything’s missing.’

‘You want her to walk through.’

‘Yeah, after they take the bodies.’ She walked out. ‘Second bedroom, not so tidy either. Rug’s askew. Furniture’s got some dust on it. Why didn’t she clean in here? Closet’s empty,’ she added, after pulling it open. ‘Who has an empty closet?’

‘Not me. If you have storage, you end up using it.’

‘Somebody was staying in here. Dirty dishes scattered around, empty containers.’ She walked to the bed, yanked the cover down, bent over to sniff the sheets. ‘Sleeping here. Tag these. We could get DNA.’

She turned a circle. ‘Someone staying here, someone they know. She’s in the kitchen, maybe fixing lunch that time of day. We’ll run the log on the AutoChef. Maybe he wants something, and she won’t give it to him.’

Letting herself see it, she walked out again, back to the kitchen. ‘He’s pissed, oh, he’s so fucking pissed. The knife’s right there, just takes it out of the block and lets her have it. Over and over. Bet that felt good.’

‘Why?’ Peabody wondered. ‘Why do you say it felt good?’

‘He didn’t run, did he? He hung around, waiting to do her husband. Another overkill. So, yeah, I’m thinking it felt just fine. Note for sweepers to check all the drains. He had to clean up, he’d be covered with blood. But he’s got hours before the husband gets home. Hours to clean himself up, to change, and to go through the place. She probably had a couple pieces of decent jewelry, easy to hock.’

‘They’d’ve had emergency cash somewhere,’ Peabody added. ‘It’s what you do, sock some away in case.’

‘Okay. Jewelry, cash. Male vic’s wallet’s gone, and he’s not wearing a wrist unit. When we find her purse, her wallet’s going to be gone, too. Electronics – that’s something we’re not seeing in here.’

‘Easy and portable.’

Eve looked at the victims again. ‘And an afterthought. You don’t kill like this for trinkets. You don’t kill people you know like this for some spare cash. You do it for a lot more. Maybe they had more. Let’s see what the neighbor has to say.’

Eve headed for the door, glanced back. ‘Run the son,’ she told Peabody.

‘You think somebody could’ve done that to his own parents?’

‘Who pisses you off more than family?’ She stepped out. ‘It’s clear for Crime Scene,’ she told the uniform. ‘And the wagon’s on the way. What’s the wit’s name?’

‘Sylvia Guntersen. Her husband’s Walter. He’s in there, too. He stayed home from work.’

‘All right.’ Eve knocked on 824. The female officer answered, a young blonde with her hair pulled back tightly at the nape of her neck.

‘Hey, Cardininni,’ said Peabody.

The blonde smiled, her frosty blue eyes warmed. ‘Hey, Peabody. Some morning, huh?’

‘You could say. Officer Cardininni and I walked the beat together a few times,’ Peabody explained to Eve.

‘Before you went Murder on us. Lieutenant. It’s good meeting you. More or less.’ She glanced over her shoulder.

‘The woman’s taking it hard. The husband’s holding on, but not by much. They were tight with the vics. Lived across the hall from each other for about a dozen years. They hung a lot, took some vacations together. Close buds.’

‘Got it.’

The apartment layout mirrored 825. The decor was less fussy, but the tidiness factor meshed. The Guntersens sat at the square-topped black kitchen table, cups in front of them. Eve judged them to be about the same age as the victims.

The woman wore her hair short, stylishly spiked, while the man went long and ponytailed. Both sets of eyes were red-rimmed, swollen. The woman took one look at Eve and began sobbing.

Eve only had to glance at Peabody to get her partner moving forward.

‘Mrs Guntersen, we’re so sorry for your loss. This is Lieutenant Dallas, and I’m Detective Peabody. We’re going to do our best for your friends.’

‘They were my friends, our best friends.’ She choked it out as she reached for her husband’s hand. ‘How could this happen to them?’

‘That’s what we’re going to find out.’ Eve took a seat at the table. ‘We need your help.’

‘I just worried when she didn’t answer, so I went in. I found them. I found Barb and Carl.’

‘I know this is hard,’ Peabody began. ‘But we have to ask you some questions.’ She measured the woman, decided

she'd do better with a task. 'Do you think we could have some coffee, ma'am?'

'Oh. Yes. Of course.' Pulling herself together, Sylvia stood up.

'When was the last time you spoke to or saw Barbara or Carl?' Eve asked.

'I talked to Barb Friday morning. Just a quick chat before Walt and I left. We went to see our daughter and her fiancé in Philadelphia for the weekend. They just got engaged.'

'Carl and I met up and had a beer after work Thursday,' Walter put in. 'That's the last I saw him.'

'When did you get back from Philadelphia?'

'Sunday night. I called Barb, but I didn't think anything of it when she didn't answer. I just figured she and Carl went out. They like to go to the vids.' Her chin wobbled, but she managed to set two cups of coffee on the table. 'Most Friday nights we go to a vid together, but we were going to see Alice and Ben, so ...'

'Who was staying with them?'

'Oh, Jerry. Their son. God, I never thought! I don't know where he could be, what might've happened to him.' Her eyes, full of fresh horror, darted toward the door. 'Is he ... is he in there?'

'No, he's not.'

'Thank God for that.'

'When did he move back home?'

'A while ago. About three weeks ago – no, nearly four – after he and his girlfriend broke up.'

‘Girlfriend’s name?’ Eve asked. ‘And the names of anyone you think he might be staying with. Friends?’

‘Um Lori. Nuccio. Lori Nuccio,’ Sylvia said. ‘And he didn’t have a lot of friends. Mal, Dave, Joe – Mal Golde, Dave Hildebran, Joe Klein. Those are the main three.’

‘Good. Coworkers?’

‘He, well, he lost his job, so he moved back in until he could straighten it all out. Jerry’s, well, Jerry’s a little bit of a problem child.’

‘He’s a lazy bastard.’

‘Walter!’ Appalled, Sylvia sat down hard. ‘That’s a terrible thing to say. He’s just lost his parents.’

‘It doesn’t change what he is.’ There was gravel in Walter’s voice now, as if hard little pebbles blocked his throat. ‘Lazy, ungrateful, and a user.’ Grief and anger spread over his face like a haze. ‘I met Carl Thursday night because he needed to talk about it. He and Barbara were at their wit’s end. That boy had been out of work for over a month, maybe a month and a half, but he hasn’t so much as looked for a job. Not that he’d keep it for long anyway.’

‘There was friction between him and his parents?’

‘Barb was upset with him,’ Sylvia said, plucking at the tiny Star of David around her throat. ‘She wanted him to grow up, make something of himself. And she really liked Lori – the girlfriend. She thought Lori could help Jerry grow up some, be a responsible man, but it didn’t work out.’

‘He blew the rent money – and what he stole from Lori – in Vegas.’

Sylvia let out a sigh, patted her husband's hand. 'It's true. He's immature and impulsive. Barb did tell me Friday morning he'd taken some money out of her house cash.'

'Where did she keep that?' Eve asked.

'In a coffee can in the back of the kitchen cupboard.'

Another glance had Peabody rising, stepping out.

'They were going to give him until the first of the month.' Walter picked up a spoon, stirred his cold coffee. 'Carl told me Thursday, he was going to talk to Barb, but he'd made up his mind. They'd give him until December first to get a job, start being responsible, or he had to go. Barbara was upset all the time, there were arguments every day, and it just couldn't go on.'

'They argued a lot,' Eve prompted.

'He'd sleep half the day, go out half the night. Then he'd complain the water wasn't wet enough, the sky wasn't blue enough. He didn't give them any respect or appreciation, and now they're gone. Now he'll never be able to make up for it.'

When he choked on tears, Sylvia leaped up to put her arms around him.

'Do you know how to get in touch with Jerry?'

'No, not really.' Sylvia soothed and stroked her husband. 'He probably went off with his friends for a few days.'

I don't think so, Eve mused, but she nodded. 'I'm sorry to ask, but would you be able to tell if anything's missing across the hall?'

Sylvia closed her eyes. 'Yes. I'm sure I would. I – I know Barb's place, her things, as well as I know my own.'

'I'd appreciate it if you'd take a look. I'll let you know when we're ready for you to do that.' Eve rose. 'We appreciate your help.'

'We'll do anything we can.' Sylvia pressed her face to her husband's shoulder, and they rocked each other.

When Eve stepped out into the hall, Peabody stood talking to Cardininni.

'Coffee can's there, and it's empty.'

'See my shocked face.'

'And the sweepers are on their way up.'

'Okay. Officer, when the scene's clear, I want you to walk Mrs Guntersen through, make a note of anything she says is missing.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Peabody, let's go find the lazy bastard son.'

'Keep it legal,' Peabody called back to Cardininni.

'When I have to.'

Eve stopped long enough at the elevators to brief the sweepers when they unloaded, then stepped on with Peabody.

'Tell me about the son.'

'Lazy bastard probably fits,' Peabody commented. 'Flunked out of college, second year in. He hasn't held a job for longer than six months, including one at his father's place of employment. His last job was delivery boy for Americana restaurant. He's had a couple minor pops for illegals, one for drunk and disorderly. Nothing big, nothing violent.'

'I think he graduated.'

‘He did that over what they had stuck in a coffee can?’

‘He did that because his life’s in the toilet and they’d decided to stop pulling him out. That’s how it strikes me. See if he’s used any credit cards, debit cards, in his father’s or his mother’s name.’

She stopped off to get the security disc from the uniform in the lobby. ‘Start canvassing the building,’ she told him. ‘Find out if anybody saw anything, heard anything. And when and if anyone saw Jerry Reinhold. Start on the eighth floor, but cover the building.’

‘Yes, sir.’

In the car, she slid the disc into the dash unit. ‘Let’s see when he left.’

She programmed it to start Friday morning, then moved it fast forward. She saw the Guntersens leave with big smiles and suitcases, and others move in, move out.

‘That’s our vic coming home from work, eighteen-twenty-three on Friday night.’

‘He looks tired,’ Peabody commented.

‘Yeah, he thinks he’s going to have an argument with his son. It’s going to be a whole lot worse.’

She ran the disc through Friday night into Saturday morning.

‘He stayed in there?’ It horrified Peabody. ‘He stayed in there with his dead parents.’

‘Plenty of time to get whatever he wanted, think things through. There he is, there he comes, twenty-twenty-eight, Saturday night. Over twenty-four hours in there with them.’

And he's hauling two suitcases. Let's check on cabs picking up at the address or on either corner at that time. Lazy bastard isn't going to drag those suitcases far.'

'He's smiling,' Peabody said quietly.

'Yeah, I see that. Keep running it, see if he comes back.' As she spoke Eve pulled out into traffic.

'Where are we going first?'

'We'll try his last known address.'

While Eve drove, Peabody multitasked. 'No activity on either of the vics' cards.'

'So he's not completely stupid.'

'And he didn't go back to the apartment.'

'Got what he could get.'

'But how far can he get on the contents of a coffee can? Even if they stashed a couple thousand in there, and that's a lot for home cash.'

'We need to check financials on both vics. Any transfers or withdrawals from any account. People tend to write down their passwords,' Eve added before Peabody could speak. 'He had plenty of time to dig out the passwords, any codes, dig into their accounts. Cab first. We could get lucky.'

Eve started to make the turn to Jerry's listed address when Peabody let out a whoop. 'I got him!' She held up a finger, continued to rapid-fire into her 'link. 'Got it. Thanks. Rapid Cab pickup,' she told Eve, 'right in front of the damn building, drop off at The Manor – that's a fancy boutique hotel, West Village.'

'Address, Peabody.'

As Peabody rattled it off, Eve hit sirens, lights, and took the corner. Peabody grabbed the chicken stick, white-knuckled it, and said a short but heartfelt prayer.

The Manor looked like just that, something found in the English countryside and once owned by a wealthy earl. The gorgeous old brownstone, obviously recently and lovingly rehabbed, boasted a wide portico entrance, fat urns of trailing flowers, and a liveried doorman Eve expected to give her grief when she pulled her dull-looking DLE into the loading zone.

She braced for it as he hotfooted over in his royal blue and gold uniform and shiny knee boots.

‘Listen, pal,’ she began before his expression changed from that of a man about to toss out some stinky garbage to warm yet distinguished welcome.

‘Lieutenant Dallas. How can we help you today?’

He threw her off stride. She hated that. But it only took her a moment to understand. The Manor belonged to Roarke, and the doorman had gotten the business-wide memo to cooperate fully with the big boss’s wife.

She didn’t really hate that, but it kind of irked.

‘I need you to leave my car where I put it, and I need the manager, asap.’

‘Absolutely. Diego!’ He signaled to a black-suited bellman just rolling out a loaded cart. ‘See that Lieutenant Dallas’s vehicle remains undisturbed. Let me get the door for you, Lieutenant.’ He pulled the tall, heavily carved door open, gestured them inside.

The lobby resembled a large parlor, appointed to Old World perfection. Just Roarke's style, Eve thought, all the gleaming wood, glossy tile, the heavy bronze lighting and abundance of artfully arranged flowers. Rather than a team manning a front desk, a woman sat at a long table in a high-backed leather chair, the same color as the doorman's livery. She wore a simple and sleek black suit and her auburn hair in a shining high ponytail.

'Rianna, this is Lieutenant Dallas and . . . I apologize.'

'Detective Peabody,' Eve said.

'They need to speak with Joleen right away.'

'Of course. Give me one moment. Won't you please have a seat?'

'We're fine.'

Still smiling, the woman tapped her earpiece. 'Joleen, Rianna at the front. Lieutenant Dallas is in the lobby. I – I will, yes.'

Another tap, another smile. 'She'll be right out. In the meantime, can we offer you any refreshment? We have a lovely menu of teas.'

'All good.' But Eve pulled out her PPC. 'Take a look at this guy. He should be registered under Jerald Reinhold. I need his room number, then I—'

'Oh, but Mr Reinhold checked out, about two hours ago.' Rianna's smile turned to a look of nearly comic distress. 'I'm so sorry.'

'Damn it. Were you on?' she asked the doorman.

'Yes, I was. I loaded his two suitcases into our complimentary airport shuttle. He said he had an early flight to Miami.'

‘Lieutenant.’ A middle-aged woman in a garnet red suit with a sweep of gilded brown hair clipped across the tiles in sky-high heels, hand extended. ‘I’m Joleen Mortimer. Welcome to The Manor. How can I help you?’

‘I need to see the room Jerald Reinhold was in. I need to know how he paid, what he ordered, if he did so, while in house, who talked to him.’

‘Of course. Rianna?’

Already swiping madly at a tablet, Rianna nodded. ‘I’m bringing it up. Mr Reinhold stayed in The Squire’s Suite. He booked Friday evening, via email, reserved with a credit card, but paid in cash on arrival Saturday evening. He also paid cash for room service, ordered at twenty-one-five, yesterday at ten-thirty, last night at seventeen hundred, and again this morning at seven. Additional charges incurred by use of the in-suite minibar.’

‘What’s the damage?’ Eve demanded.

‘I’m sorry.’

‘How much did he spend?’

‘Oh . . .’ Rianna glanced at her manager, got a brisk nod. ‘Three thousand, six hundred dollars and forty-five cents total on his bill, paid in full. With cash, as I said.’

‘We’ll need a copy of everything you have. And I need to see his room. Now.’

‘Come with me.’ Joleen clipped her way across the tiles again to a bronze elevator door. ‘It’s in the process of being turned.’

‘Make that stop,’ Eve ordered.

‘Yes, I did. I’ve instructed housekeeping to leave any trash, laundry, dishes in the room.’

‘Good thinking. I also need copies of your security discs, entrance, his floor, elevators, lobby.’

‘I’ll see to it.’

Maybe it didn’t irk so much after all.

‘May I ask what Mr Reinhold did?’

‘He’s the prime suspect in a double homicide.’

‘Well, my . . . goodness.’

Joleen led the way off the elevator, down a wide hall to the left. She swiped her pass key over a pad in front of a snowy white door with a bronze plaque reading *THE SQUIRE’S SUITE*.

‘Peabody.’

At Eve’s direction, Peabody headed for a tidily tied bag of trash by the door. Eve studied the petite dining table, scattered with plates, cups, glasses.

‘He ate a hearty breakfast.’

‘Eggs Benedict, a split of champagne, fresh orange juice, a pot of hot chocolate, mixed berries with whipped cream, a large apple tart, a rasher of bacon.’ Joleen glanced up. ‘I’m checking on the specifics, and can tell you he ordered Shrimp à la Emilie – a house specialty – as an appetizer, a filet mignon – medium rare – with salted roasted potatoes, extra butter requested, candied carrots, a chocolate soufflé, two chocolate chunk cookies, and a bottle of our Jouët Premium champagne on the night of his arrival. He also had eight Cokes, three waters, two jars of cashews, the Chocolate Dandies and the fruit gummies, and assorted liquor from the in-room bar.’

‘Eating like a king,’ Eve muttered, ‘with a massive sweet tooth.’

She circled the room. He’d used it, she thought, noting the entertainment discs tossed around, the scatter of glasses.

‘Can you check if he used that?’ Eve gestured toward the house link placed discreetly on a curved-leg desk.

‘I did. Only for in house, to order room service, and again to check on the airport shuttle.’

‘Nothing here, Lieutenant,’ Peabody announced.

‘Miami.’

‘I’ve got that going,’ Peabody told her, tapped her PPC. ‘It’ll take a while to run all the transpos – shuttles, commercial, charter, private.’

With a nod, Eve walked into the bedroom. Housekeeping had already stripped the bed, but left the laundry in an orderly pile on the floor. She checked the closet, the dresser, every drawer, the bath while Peabody did the same in the parlor area.

‘He’s messy,’ Eve calculated. ‘Tossing his towels around, playing with all the amenities, spilling a lot, going through the entertainment discs, hitting the in-room bar, ordering heavy meals. Playing hotel, playing big shot, that’s what he was doing.’

‘He figures he can afford it.’ Peabody frowned at the screen of her PPC as Eve turned to her. ‘I just got a hit on the financials. The Reinholds had eighty-four thousand and change in joint accounts, another forty and change in a floater, and six thousand in a debit card account. Every bit of

it was transferred, via wire, with Carl Reinhold's data, Friday night and Saturday. He did the transfers in pieces, wired them to three different accounts under his name. He got it all.'

'Not if we freeze it.' Eve grabbed her 'link.

'It's too late, Dallas. He's pulled it out. Cash and cashier's checks, in person. He hit the last bank less than fifteen minutes ago.'

'Now he's got a hundred-thirty large after spending some. He's got playing money. And he sure as hell isn't in Miami.'

'Lieutenant,' Joleen began, 'if there's anything we can do?'

'You've done what you can do. It's noted and appreciated. We'll just need copies of the security discs, and his paperwork.'

'You'll have it.'

Thinking, thinking, Eve moved to the door, and out. 'He won't come back, but on the off chance.'

'Yes, I'll have his photo and name posted. Should he return to The Manor, I'll contact you personally.'

'That works. How long have you worked for Roarke?'

Joleen smiled. 'Three years in this position. I was the assistant manager here for the previous owners. When Roarke acquired The Manor, he asked if I would consider taking temporary positions at some of his other hotels for the six months estimated for remodeling. And in addition if I would train staff, specifically for The Manor, then take the manager's position when we opened again.'

'Roarke knows how to pick his team. What about the previous manager here?'

Joleen's smile sharpened a little. 'Let's say he didn't make the cut.'

She walked them across the lobby to where Rianna had a disc bag and a thick envelope waiting.

'I hope you catch him quickly.' Joleen offered her hand again to Eve, then Peabody.

'That's the plan.'

'That was pleasant,' Peabody commented when they were back in the car. 'Frustrating, but pleasant. If Roarke owned everything, this part of the job would run smoother.'

'He's working on it. I'm going to drop you at the first bank, then check out his last known address, go by the morgue. Get yourself to all three financial places, see what you can find out. Let's put out a BOLO, all transpo centers, rental vehicles.'

'No driver's license,' Peabody pointed out.

'He could skim on that if he found somebody stupid enough.'

'He could buy a car.'

'Big chunk of his pie, but let's cover that, and the high-end hotels. He wants the good life now.'

After she dropped Peabody off, she circled around, and tried to imagine what Jerry might be doing. He'd either want a way out of the city or a place to settle in it, for a while at least. Hauling two suitcases? Too much work and annoyance.

He had what he wanted from his parents' apartment. Eliminate them, take their money and valuables.

Why risk staying in New York?

But she thought he might. He wasn't stupid, she decided, or not entirely. But he was an idiot. Blowing over three thousand on a hotel room and food – for one night? Smart to hide out until Monday, banking hours, grab the rest of the money; stupid to spend so much of it just so he could gloat.

She pulled up at his last known address, flipped up her On Duty light. Since he liked to gloat, wouldn't he like to brag to friends? Maybe roll out and hit Vegas again, see if his luck improved there, or go sun on some tropical beach?

He'd had a girlfriend, Eve reminded herself, made a note to interview her.

She used her master to gain access to the dumpy three-story walk-up, ignored the rickety elevator, and took the stairs to the top floor.